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THE PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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Herbert Spencer, in an address in New York City, said, "Exclusive devotion to work has the result that amusements cease to please; and when recreation becomes imperative life becomes dreary from lack of its sole interest,—the interest in business. Life is not for learning, nor is life for working, but learning and working are for life. In brief, I may say that we have had somewhat too much of the gospel of work. It is time to preach the gospel of relaxation." Something like this is the observation of nearly every thoughtful visitor to the United States. No characteristics of the American people are more striking than the habit of excessive work, "a whole lifetime of horrid industry," as Bagehot says, and our ignorance of the place of recreation and relaxation in a long, well-ordered and efficient life.

It may seem to readers of this number of *THE ANNALS* that we have made in recent years, and are now making, great progress in our public provision for recreation. We are, and yet, compared with the countries of Europe, the United States is still far behind both in the facilities that it possesses and in the way in which it utilizes them. It may be questioned whether the present increase of facilities for recreation greatly exceeds the increase in demand. Especially is this true with regard to children. The restoration of their rights to play is proceeding, but proceeding too slowly. It needs to be more widely recognized that play as a form of recreation is indispensable. There is still too much anxiety, too much greed.

We need more plain pleasures, for recreation rightly used is a resource for the common purposes of daily life that is entitled to rank with education, with art, with friendship. It is one of the means ordained for the promotion of health and cheerfulness and morality. As one of our modern philosophers has said, "Vice must be fought by welfare, not by restraint; and society is not safe until to-day's pleasures are stronger than its temptations," adding with

true optimism and sound insight, "Amusement is stronger than vice and can strangle the lust of it." Not only does morality thus rest back on recreation, but so does efficiency in every direction. One-half of efficiency and happiness depends upon vitality, and vitality depends largely upon recreation, especially the simple recreations of the open air.

The purpose of this introductory article is briefly to describe the nature and character of the parks and recreation facilities in the United States, to define roughly the place and function of national, state, and city parks, and to refer to a few of the general principles that do not fall so naturally to any one of the more specific articles which constitute this volume.

I. National Parks

Our national parks comprise great tracts in the far West which have been set aside by the federal government because of their altogether uncommon interest or great beauty. From the comparatively small area in the Yellowstone, proclaimed by President Harrison in 1891, we now have five great national parks, the Yellowstone, Yosemite, General Grant, Sequoia, and Mt. Rainier.¹ These include within their boundaries more than 40,000,000 acres.

The Yellowstone is a broad, wholesome wilderness on the summit of the Rocky Mountains, with its territory lying mostly in Wyoming, though encroaching upon the borders of Montana and Idaho. It has a total area of more than 8,000,000 acres; the broad central plateau is surrounded by high mountains, and in its very midst is the Yellowstone Lake, with its shore line of a hundred miles. The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone is twenty miles in length and a thousand feet deep, and there are thousands of hot springs and hundreds of wild geysers. From the foot-hills and up the lower slopes of the mountains are extensive forests, interrupted only by lakes, meadows, or small burned-over places; in fact, this tree mantle covers nearly eighty-five per cent of the entire park.

¹The Grand Canyon of the Colorado River was named by President Roosevelt in 1908, as a National Monument, and may, I presume, be looked upon now as a park reservation. In his proclamation, the President stated that "The Grand Canyon of the Colorado River is an object of unusual scenic interest, being the greatest eroded canyon within the United States, and it appears that the public interests would be promoted by reserving it as a National Monument with such other land as is necessary for its proper protection."

The Yosemite, only one hundred and forty miles distant from San Francisco, is in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, and is thirty-six miles in length and forty-eight in breadth. It includes generous samples of the wondrous treasures of the Sierras, and in its very heart is the famous Yosemite Valley. Here also is the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, which is again in danger of being destroyed. Year after year attacks have been made on this park under the guise of the development of natural resources, and at the last session of Congress the most determined attack of all was made by the city of San Francisco in its attempt to get possession of this valley as a reservoir site, thus destroying its scenic integrity merely for the sake of saving money to the people of San Francisco. Congress should refuse this request; furthermore, it should adopt laws that would put an end to such assaults on our national parks. In the lower section of the Yosemite are the coniferous forests which surpass all forests of the kind in the world, not only in the size and beauty of the trees, but in the number of assembled species.

The Sequoia is a relatively small park in the Sierras of California, which lies to the south of the Yosemite. As it stands, it includes by far the largest and most important section of big trees. Yet this area should be increased to conform with the boundaries established by nature, for then it would be not only better in itself, but would comprise nine-tenths of all the big trees in existence.

The General Grant is the smallest of the national parks and is located in California a little to the north of the Sequoia. Like the latter, it is essentially a preserve of big trees.

The Mt. Rainier Park is a portion of the region immediately surrounding the mountain, which has been set aside from the forest reserve. It is situated in the State of Washington. Of all the mountains along the Pacific Coast, Mt. Rainier is the noblest in form, has the most interesting forest cover and, with the exception of Mt. Shasta, is the tallest. Its forests reach to a height of a little over 6,000 feet and above this is a wealth of Alpine flora. As in the case of the Sequoia, this park is too small, and should include a more generous share of the surrounding forest reserve.

The purposes of forests and parks should not be confused. Forest lands are selected and afterwards maintained primarily with regard to the growth of timber and the protection and regulation of the water supply,—purposes of immense importance to permanent

prosperity. Other purposes than these are incidental and, if considered at all, are subordinate. In the case of parks, however, the main purposes are the preservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the provision for recreation. Park purposes other than these may, it is true, be taken into account, but they must be quite incidental. Thus the minor purposes of forests may correspond somewhat with the major purposes of parks, and vice versa; but the main and essential purposes of one are altogether different from the main and essential purposes of the other, and any confusion of them is sure to lead to waste, misunderstanding and disappointment.

These national parks are unequaled in wonder, beauty and extent by all the other recreation facilities in the United States, but if they are to serve their great purposes, they must have a more stable, more consistent, more scientific, and more artistic policy of development. The present division of authority and the lack of permanency of control cannot be expected to yield the best results. William E. Curtis, who contributes a special article on "Our National Parks" in this number of *THE ANNALS*, pointed out some time ago on the occasion of a visit to "the Yellowstone" the necessity for action in this direction when he said that "There ought to be a commission of broad-minded men with a thorough knowledge of parks and public resorts in Europe and other countries, with experience in handling large affairs and with artistic tastes, who shall be authorized by Congress to investigate the conditions of the park and lay out a permanent plan for its protection and improvement, for the location of hotels and other buildings, for the construction of roads, etc., and they should revise the regulations so that the greatest public playground in the world may be enjoyed to its full extent by the people of the United States for whom it is intended."

It is surprising, in looking at the map of the United States, to find that all the parks of the nation are in the far West. If one were unfamiliar with the physiography and beauty of the country, the natural inference would be that there is nothing worth preserving in the other sections. That view, however, would be far from the truth. In several other sections, and especially in the great Appalachian Mountain system of the East, there is a unique opportunity to add to the attractiveness and the geographical range of the nation's park possessions; and to do it at reasonable cost. If the parks in the West are justified—and who questions it—parks in the

East would be. There is an imperative call for an even larger and especially for a better balanced system of national parks, and the time for action has arrived.

II. *State Parks*

Although state parks are never likely to have the great acreage of national parks, they may prove to be more generally useful as recreation grounds for the great body of the people. Outside the cities the states are most often the natural units to act effectively in the establishment of large natural parks. As a rule, the topographical feature, lake, river, valley, or mountain, is more or less complete within a state, and the people of the entire state are concerned in the preservation of these features. The state, too, is financially strong enough to move successfully, securing before it is too late great tracts of five, ten, or twenty thousand acres according to the opportunity and need in each particular case. As these acquisitions are much more in the nature of investment than expense, the land increasing rather than decreasing in value, the cost should not be met from current income, but by state bond issues for periods of forty or fifty years, thus distributing the cost of the land among several generations.

Some states have appreciated the logic of this situation. Massachusetts, for example, awoke to its importance nearly a score of years ago. A body of public-spirited men then petitioned the legislature, stating that the seashores, river banks, the mountain tops, and almost all the finest parts of the natural beauty of Massachusetts, were possessed by **private** persons, whose private interests often dictated the destruction of this beauty or at least the exclusion of the public from the enjoyment thereof. The inquiry inaugurated as a result of this petition is full of suggestion and warning to newer or more sparsely settled states. With reference to the ocean shore, for example, the Massachusetts agent found a great population on land hedged away from the beach and all conditions pointing to a time, not remote either, when nobody could walk by the sea in Massachusetts without the payment of a fee, as was formerly the case for a glimpse of Niagara. Resulting from this and somewhat similar movements, the State of Massachusetts has already acquired some large and valuable holdings, first through direct action of the state appropriating money for the purchase of park

lands, secondly through state-appointed commissions, and thirdly through the trustees of public reservations, a board created to receive and care for gifts of land to the state.

The achievements of a few other states are equally encouraging. New York has a notable, even if incomplete and threatened, possession at Niagara Falls. It has a good park in the Adirondack Mountains, in Watkins Glen, and Stony Point, in the great gorge of the Genesee River, and in co-operation with New Jersey, an extremely useful reservation in the Palisades of the Hudson River, which, if the recent offer of Mrs. E. H. Harriman and others is accepted, is likely to be extended to include 25,000 acres or more, making it the largest and noblest of all the state parks and one of the finest public reservations in the world.² California, not content with the big national parks within its borders, has invested \$250,000 in a state park near Boulder Creek, thereby acquiring a sample of redwoods as they have been for 10,000 years and one which may be preserved for all time to come. Minnesota, Michigan, Kansas, and one or two other states, I believe, have shown regard for some of their natural resources by making public reservations of beautiful and interesting scenery.

But in state parks the real lead, so far as a policy is concerned, must be accorded to Wisconsin. This is not surprising, for the people of that commonwealth have a reputation for sound and progressive ideas and an unusual devotion to measures which promise to promote the common welfare. Two years ago, in accordance with the action of the state legislature, the governor appointed a state park board of three members. That board with its landscape adviser made a systematic examination of Wisconsin's resources in scenery, with the definite purpose of securing for the people what was best and most distinctive. The report was presented to the

²Mrs. E. H. Harriman, in compliance with the wishes of her late husband, has offered the State of New York for a state park 10,000 acres of beautiful land on the Hudson near her home and a million dollars. To this munificent gift, John D. Rockefeller and J. Pierpont Morgan have added a half million dollars each; others have subscribed sums that will bring the total to over two and a half million dollars. These gifts are conditioned upon the State of New York appropriating another two and a half million dollars, making five million dollars in all, and 10,000 acres of land for the extension of the Palisade Park. The proposal is magnificent in itself and illustrates the great appeal that state parks will make both to individuals of wealth and to the people of the states. Governor Hughes gives his hearty endorsement to this project and recommends the appropriation by the state of the sum asked for, the money to be provided by the issue of state bonds.

legislature last winter, and a liberal appropriation made at once to enable the state park board to begin the acquisition of land. Some 3,800 acres in Door County, including eight miles of beautiful bay shores, have already been purchased, and before the work is completed, the Wisconsin state parks will probably include at least one example of each type of its wonderfully beautiful natural scenery.

The requirements of state parks may be conveniently summarized under five heads: (1) They should, as a rule, be large, otherwise they cannot be used by great numbers of people without the destruction of the very qualities most essential to their purpose. (2) They should be accessible, not to the degree that city parks are, but accessible to the people of a state by train or boat or vehicle, within reasonable time and at reasonable expense. (3) The air and climate of sections within which state parks are located should be salubrious and the situation healthful. (4) The property for state parks should be moderate in cost. Seldom would a state be justified in paying an average of over a hundred dollars an acre for a tract of any considerable size. Not only should the first cost be low, but as a rule the property should be of such a character as to require relatively small expenditure for construction or maintenance. (5) Finally, the site for a state park should, above all, have decided and uncommon charm, a distinction among landscapes, an irresistible appeal to the nature lover. Here there should be no room for doubt, for failure in this point means complete failure. State parks must be unmistakably beautiful; they must present to the enjoyment of all some consistent unspoiled type of landscape.

Corresponding in some respects with state parks and in other respects with city parks are those parks established during the last decade or two, under the jurisdiction of counties, townships or metropolitan districts. They illustrate the value of co-operation, and are a recognition of the advantages of joint action. The best example of a county organization is the Essex County Park Commission of New Jersey, which has outlined one of the best systems in the country and already secured and improved under expert guidance over 3,500 acres. Its greatest lack at present is an adequate system of connecting parkways. The most successful illustration of the metropolitan district organization is the Boston Metropolitan Park Commission. Organized in 1892, this system now includes

over 10,000 acres of parks and public reservations, 30 miles of river banks, 8 miles of seashore, and 27 miles or more of boulevards and parkways. All these recreation grounds are now organized into a unified system which surpasses in extent not only anything which this country has produced, but in many respects anything similar in Europe as well.

III. *City Parks*

City parks are much better known than national parks or state parks. Every city worthy of the name has public parks of some sort, and they are now recognized as a necessity of city life,—just as streets and water and schools are a necessity. They contribute to the pleasure and health of urban populations more than any other recreative feature, and furnish the most necessary and available antidote to the artificiality, confusion, and feverishness of life in cities. At the present time the value of parks and open spaces in towns and cities is very generally appreciated. It is recognized that such facilities as parks afford are not only desirable, but increasingly necessary; in fact indispensable. In a vague way there is approval, too, of a large increase in both parks and playgrounds. But few even of the more enlightened communities appear yet to understand with any clearness that these open spaces in cities are of great variety, that they are, or should be, selected and developed by experts to serve essentially different purposes, and that the failure to appreciate this fact, and to keep it constantly in mind, leads to great waste and inefficiency in our public grounds.

The term “parks” is used in a loose sense to cover all public grounds. City squares, commons, public gardens, playgrounds, neighborhood centers, parkways, the great outlying reservations, and parks proper,—all are loosely termed “parks.” City squares, commons and public gardens are usually of small size, and are found in the business as well as the residential sections of cities. Their practical functions are to furnish agreeable views for those passing by or through them, to provide a pleasant resting place for those who take the time to use them in this manner, and in some cases to afford an appropriate and agreeable foreground to public or semi-public buildings. Playgrounds are different from squares, and should be designed primarily for play. They are usually divided for convenience into three classes, those for little tots, those for

children of the school age, and those for older boys and men or for girls and women. In no other department of public recreation has there recently been such a development. The Year Book of the Playground Association of America, just issued, shows that out of 950 cities and towns in the United States having a population of 5,000 or over, 336 maintain supervised playgrounds, and the actual number of playgrounds conducted in these cities will number nearly 2,000.

One of the most important results of the study that has been given to play and playgrounds is the very general appreciation that the play leader rather than elaborate equipment is the essential feature. Reliable figures, showing the appropriations for playgrounds, are incomplete, but the returns from one-half of the cities show an expenditure in 1909 of over a million dollars. But before we have a widespread and efficient system, in which the true function of play is recognized, this sum will have to be greatly increased. "Only in the modern city," writes Jane Addams, "have men concluded that it is no longer necessary for the municipality to provide for the insatiable desire for play. In so far as they have acted upon this conclusion, they have entered upon a most difficult and dangerous experiment, and this at the very moment when the city has become distinctly industrial, and daily labor is continually more monotonous and sub-divided. We forget how new the modern city is, and how short the span of time in which we have assumed that we can eliminate public provision for recreation."

Parkways and boulevards are agreeable promenades in themselves, and serve usually as pleasant means of access to parks from the various parts of the city or from one park to another. A parkway is apt to include more breadth of turf or ground planted with trees and shrubbery than a boulevard, giving it a more park-like character and inducing a less formal treatment of the roads, paths, and accessory features. Boulevards are usually arranged more formally with rows of shade trees and parallel ways for pedestrians and vehicles. But the chief feature of a city park system is the large park, comprising in most cases from two hundred to a thousand acres or even more. Its main purpose is to place within the reach of the people of a city the enjoyment of such a measure as is practicable of pleasing rural scenery; and the justification of its size, interfering as it does with streets and other city developments, is

the necessity for spaciousness in the production of scenery that is broad and natural and beautiful. One of the chief problems of the landscape architect is to make these parks available and useful to great numbers of people without destroying the natural appearance of their scenery,—the main purpose for which they have been created.

The conviction is steadily spreading that a city needs not only to provide itself with each class of recreation grounds, but that these grounds should be outlined, acquired, and developed as a *system*, each part having relation to every other part. Just as a city needs a street system, a school system, a water system, and systems to provide for its other municipal activities, so it needs a comprehensive, well-distributed, well-developed system of parks and pleasure grounds. As yet few cities have been able to secure a well-balanced park plan. Some cities have a liberal provision of public squares, but few playgrounds and parks, and no parkways. Others have large parks and boulevards, but no playgrounds, while still others have parks and boulevards and playgrounds, but few public squares. Many examples could be given of the unsatisfactory and incomplete and one-sided way in which our so-called park systems have been developed. The public grounds of practically all our cities have been selected and improved by isolated and desultory proceedings. The result in most cases has led to an unnecessary waste of money and opportunity. Happily, there are exceptions. A few of the larger cities have, with the aid of expert advice, worked out thoughtful and consistent plans, and in the Middle West even the smaller cities have conceived a system, and gradually, piece by piece, this system is being patiently executed.

One of the greatest influences now operating toward a better provision for parks and other recreation facilities in this country is city planning. The movement is spreading rapidly from city to city and from town to town. Its aims are many, but primarily it is an attempt to forecast and provide for the requirements of the city as a whole, and to anticipate by a reasonable period the improvements and developments which such a forecast shows to be desirable and in some form or other inevitable. City planning is, therefore, an effort to save waste—waste due to thoughtless delay, to haphazard procedure and to ill-considered plans. When city planning is wise it works in harmony with local conditions, takes account of

topography, and responds to the peculiar social and economic influences of the locality. One of its dominant purposes always, however, is to promote, to extend, and to make more adequate and more perfect the provisions for public recreation.

The conclusions that appear justified by this brief survey of parks and pleasure grounds are: (1) That the national parks are of inestimable worth, but their greatest value requires a somewhat different administration, and the existing parks in the West should be supplemented and balanced by parks in other sections. (2) That the comparatively small beginnings of state parks should be carried to their legitimate developments until every state in the Union has a comprehensive system, embracing its most valuable and characteristic natural scenic resources. (3) That city parks should be selected with more discrimination, designed with more skill, greatly increased in area, and developed in a more co-ordinate fashion.

But parks, even in the broad sense in which the term is here used, do not constitute the only facility for public recreation. Music and the drama, art galleries, scientific museums, zoological gardens,—these offer most important and efficient facilities for public recreation. Unfortunately, many American towns and cities are unprovided with these facilities, and even when they exist, they are often inadequate. The people are not yet willing to appropriate money in sufficient sums to acquire and maintain parks or to provide for such other recreation facilities as those mentioned. The action of the Paris Chamber of Deputies a month ago, authorizing a loan of \$180,000,000 for an elaborate scheme of improvements, has no proportional parallel in this country. As an illustration of the scale of expenditure here, a bond issue of the Providence Metropolitan Park Commission may be cited. After great effort approval was secured for a loan of \$250,000 for the development of the Providence metropolitan district, which contains a population of nearly half a million people. According to the official report of this commission, the annual cost per capita of this bond issue is not quite equal to "that of three striped sticks of candy."

Private individuals have in some cities made generous gifts to the recreation of the people, and in other cities, notably New York, there has been a successful co-operation between public appropriations and private wealth. This is most encouraging and is likely to

continue, for there is an increased appreciation of the intimate relation between public recreation and the public welfare. One of the main conclusions of the committee that investigated the social evil in New York City a few years ago under the chairmanship of the late William H. Baldwin, Jr., was the necessity of "furnishing, by public provision or private munificence, of purer and more elevating forms of amusement to supplant the attractions of the low dance-halls, theatres, and other similar places of entertainment that only serve to stimulate sensuality and to debase the taste. The pleasures of the people need to be looked after far more earnestly than has been the case hitherto. If we would banish the kind of amusements that degrade, we must offer to the public in this large cosmopolitan city, where the appetite for pleasure is keen, some sort of suitable alternatives."

In conclusion, it may be said with regard to facilities for public recreation, as with regard to so many other matters, that, first of all, a clearer conception is needed of what is possible. We must escape from certain narrow, petty, and conventional views, low standards and ungenerous ideals. We must see the great possibilities of recreation, form a more definite policy, and bring to bear upon its execution a greater measure of wisdom, energy, and wealth.